



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ORGANIZED LABOR AND MILITARY SERVICE ¹

JOHN P. WHITE

President United Mine Workers of America

I AM asked to discuss, from the point of view of organized labor: (1) The obligation of citizenship to the common defense; and (2) compulsory or volunteer military training, as to fundamental principles and methods.

Another question is raised by mere statement of the subject. To organized labor, this is the question of immediate importance: What constitutes the "common defense"? If we can agree on that point, it will be much easier to agree on the others.

Labor accepts nationalism as a fact and as a necessary expedient for the progress of the race. Labor is patriotic. It sees these 100,000,000 people of ours as a nation, bound together by our devotion to certain ideals. These ideals are liberty, justice, education, and equality of opportunity for every child. They are the same for every American; but whereas a part of us have actually attained these ideals, the great majority of us are still striving to attain them. For the great majority of wage-earners, they still are only ideals.

There are between 20,000,000 and 30,000,000 wage-earners in America today, and the United States Public Health Service tells us that hardly more than half of these earn enough to maintain a healthful, decent existence. Of these, less than 3,000,000 have freed themselves from industrial tyranny and feudalism so far as to enjoy the right to bargain collectively and to interpose a strong organization between the individual worker and the employer, for the worker's full protection. Of the children of the workers, only a small percentage go out into the world equipped, as they should be, with an education fitting them to win in the struggle for

¹ Read by title at the afternoon meeting of the Academy of Political Science on May 18, 1916.

bread. And who will say that the under-nourished children of the workers in mill and factory, surrounded throughout their infancy and youth by poverty and ugliness and anxiety, enjoy equal opportunity?

And so we have this difference of opinion as to what America means. To the workers, it means a land where the ideals of liberty and justice and equality are supreme, where the opportunity exists to make them real, but where they are still ideals with the hour of their attainment still far off. They love this land nevertheless for the hope it holds out to them, for the assurance that here they have at least a free field in which to strive and struggle. If only the comfortable, well-fed men and women who march in preparedness parades and who yearn for glory on foreign fields of battle could understand the martial spirit and the fervent devotion that animate the workers in their struggle for the attainments of American ideals!

But to the wealthy and powerful and influential, America means something very different. It means, not the opportunity for struggle to make real what is now only dreamed of, but something already accomplished—accomplished in 1776 and in 1861-65. The spirit of America, the spirit of American ideals, is not in the keeping of any group or class. But if that spirit was ever involved in any struggle or movement in this country, if those ideals were ever at stake, then the spirit is involved and the ideals are at stake in the struggle that is only just beginning in this country to conquer the nation for its own people, to win for the workers and the producers the liberty and the justice and the well-being to which they are entitled. To that struggle, organized labor is committed. For it organized labor exists. Nothing else is so important. Nothing else is important at all, except as it directly or indirectly affects the attainment of the American ideals for which labor is striving.

I do not agree with those who charge that the cry for great armaments and for an aggressive foreign policy is entirely the work of selfish interests. I think it is very largely tied up with the interest of American international bankers

and munition makers. It is they who pull the strings. But the chief danger does not lie in selfish financial and commercial interests. By themselves they could do little. It lies in the idleness and boredom of our well-to-do and wealthy leisure class. That class unfortunately cannot join in the great heroic struggle of the toilers for the attainment of American ideals. As a class, it rests under the delusion that American ideals have already been completely realized, and the men and women who compose it are red-blooded enough to want something to do more exciting than golf or tennis or bridge, more exciting even than fox-trotting on Broadway or playing the market on Wall Street. As a class, it is highly romantic, it has a code that belongs to past centuries, when nations were divided into the gentility and the populace, when gentlemen drew swords over absurd points of honor, and when kings declared war over fine points of honor no less absurd than those of the duelling code. It is a class that would plunge this nation into war today over some issue that means infinitely less to the average American, either as a matter of honor or material welfare, than the conduct of the police or the constabulary or the armed guards in any one of a dozen strikes.

What does war mean to labor? It means death to their dearest hopes. It means the re-establishment, where they do not still exist, of feudalism and autocracy, in order that everything may be subordinated to the success of the war. And when the war is over the feudalism and autocracy remain. It means the absolute suspension of the struggle for more democracy and justice. A strike becomes treason, and in the passion of the moment any man temporarily in command can work his will by resorting to the sacred word "patriotism". It means establishing the habit of obedience without thought or question. It means the death and maiming of the workers in the proportion of about four to one of other groups of the population.

And so labor cannot discuss with much enthusiasm the methods of preparing for war. But labor must be prepared for the worst. If war comes, the workers will respond. Whatever the cause, no matter how great the pity and the sin of it,

they will respond. And it is well that you challenge us to say how the response shall be ordered. We must think of it, and be prepared to insist that as much of those things we love shall be preserved, even in war, as can be preserved.

Perhaps all I have said belongs properly in a discussion of diplomacy and not of military means. I realize that this nation cannot be defenseless in a military sense. We must be prepared just to the extent that other nations will understand and respect our strength without fearing it. I believe we are already prepared to that extent and that any considerable addition to our armament would be construed by other nations that we have war-like and aggressive intentions, that we fear and expect trouble. There is no better way of getting into trouble than to show that you fear and expect it.

Let us keep up our navy. Let us keep alive among us the science of arms through the maintenance of a small expert army. Let us have a thorough overhauling of our military establishment to assure ourselves that our expert military men are foresighted and abreast of developments. Let us have a plan for the quick mobilization of men and munitions and supplies.

Above all, let us reorganize our present military force on a basis that will permit its enlargement, if ever the need arises, without endangering democratic ideals. Leaving aside every other objection, labro will always fight any considerable extension of our military forces so long as the army and navy are ruled by a class and a caste. The social distinction that goes with a position as officer in the army is one of the most insidious evils connected with militarism. That is why many a man who is a snob and an autocrat and an enemy of true democracy is today clamoring for preparedness. It is for them a new sport, a new means of climbing toward social distinction. It is no more dangerous than polo, and the people pay the bills.

Give us an army, in which any enlisted man of intelligence and industry can hope to attain a commission. Abolish the age limit after which enlisted men are ineligible for examination for a commission. Provide for West-Point training for

any enlisted man who shows ability and who passes certain fair tests. Diminish the number of offenses for which enlisted men can be tried by court-martial and imprisoned for long terms without a trial by jury.

Several well-meaning writers and speakers have advocated an industrial army—the use of the regular army during times of peace for the construction of public works and similar tasks. I wish to point out the danger of such a scheme. Militarism belongs with a past age. Probably it can never be made truly democratic. The conduct of war means autocratic rule by a few. And however we may reform our army in these respects there will always remain the poison of military absolutism. Let us not poison civil life with this spirit of autocracy. Let us not set a dangerous precedent for private employers by putting the government's industrial workers under a drill sergeant or a major. The time is coming when hundreds of thousands of workmen will be in government employ. We do not want them organized on a military basis.

The proposal to establish compulsory military service in this country is the saddest and most abject surrender of American ideals ever made in this country. It is that because it is put forward on the ground that only through putting men in regiments, under martial law, and drilling them with weapons of slaughter, can we make our young men efficient and patriotic!

Labor knows a better way. Establish industrial freedom. Abolish privilege. Give the workers a voice in determining wages and conditions, and with that voice a responsibility. Pay him his just wage, so that he can provide leisure and education for himself and his children, so that he can afford the services of a good doctor, so that he can buy books and pictures and magazines, so that he can bring up his children happy, healthy, strong, intelligent and free; above all, so that he can raise his voice in the councils of his country. He will raise it, as the 2,000,000 members of organized labor invariably have raised it, in behalf of humanity and justice and liberty, in behalf of the honor that means, not glory for a handful of leaders, but life and freedom for the millions.